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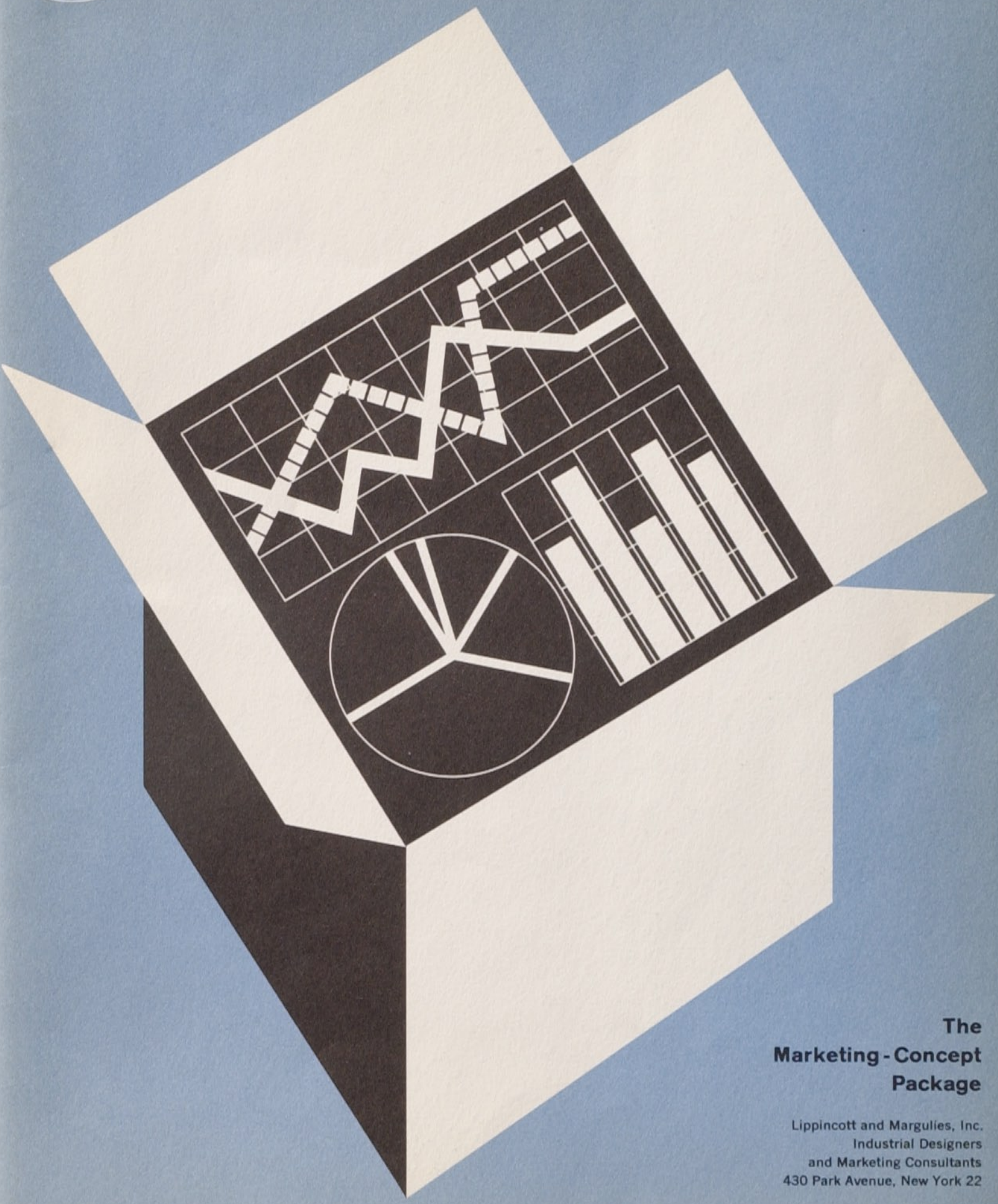
DESIGN SENSE 23



The Marketing-Concept Package

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23

A publication
on design as it affects
marketing, merchandising,
package and
product planning, research
and store planning.
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New York 22, New York

THE MARKETING-CONCEPT PACKAGE

Nothing succeeds like success, the saying goes. It is an aphorism we propose to quarrel with in this issue of DESIGN SENSE. Our target of dispute: that most-vaunted, most successful of modern marketing tools, the package.

Not so long ago, the well-designed package was a rarity. Only a few of the items which lined the supermarket shelves displayed a grasp of the techniques required for success in the self-service environment. In the last ten years, however, those same techniques have become the common property of nearly all who purvey packaged goods. Today, it is the inefficiently-designed package which is rare.

What happens now to the competitive advantage promised by the successful package? Can success fail as well as succeed?

If the situation is paradoxical, it is also urgent. Not only are some "good" packages failing, but the impact of packaging in general threatens to diminish in the new market environment. Yet packaging costs continue to rise.

The remedy, we maintain, lies not in exhortation, but in action, leading to a new concept of packaging, a concept rooted in the era which lies ahead, not in the bygone days of the last decade.

In the ensuing pages, we outline the general approach which we believe this new concept must embody. Broad in scope, complex in form, it views the package through the far-sighted lens of the total market, eschewing the traditional myopic spectacles of applied graphic design. That was for the fifties. This is for the sixties.

A special insert is included in this issue, a questionnaire on package planning. We invite those of our readers who are actively involved in packaging to fill it out and return it to us. We will be happy to send them a brief evaluation of the effectiveness of their packaging programs, based on their replies.

J. Gordon Lippincott, Chairman of the Board *Walter P. Margulies, President*

Wish-Bone
Wish-Bone
ITALIAN
Italian
Good Seasons
Sanka coffee
NESCAFE
10¢ OFF
Chase & Sanborn
10¢ OFF
DECAF COFFEE
MAXWELL HOUSE
COFFEE
Pillsbury
Betty Crocker
Yellow
Duncan Hines
OFF
Swans Down
YELLOW
FLUFFY
all
With "Controlled Suds"
4¢ OFF
CONDENSED
Dash
safe low-suds
AUTOMATIC WASHERS
Wisk
FOR FAMILY WASH
BLUE LIQUID
LAUNDRY DETERGENT
new
FAB
heavy duty formula
5¢ OFF
LARGE SIZE
AD
FOR AUTOMATIC WASHERS
concentrated low suds
New
Vel
5¢ off
BLUE
cheer
GIVES A DEEPER
PREMIUM WHITE!
NEW! IMPROVED
Rinso
Blue
the MODERN DETERGENT
5¢ OFF
REGULAR PRICE
OF THIS PACKAGE
Surf
ALL-PURPOSE DETERGENT
SPECIAL! 3¢ OFF
LUX
mild...safe
SOAP FLAKES
New!
Instant
Ivory
FLAKES
all
CONTROLLED SUDS
special
2¢ OFF
PUFFED
RICE
FREE BOWL AND JUICE GLASS
Post
40%
Bran Flakes
Kellogg's
Special K
WHEAT
CHEX
SAVE 7¢
Frosty O's
Cheerios
hi-pro
high protein
flakes
FREE
BASEBALL
TRADING
CARDS
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SUGAR
CRISP
Kellogg's
CORN
FLAKES
FREE!
DELL COMIC
HARVEST
WHEAT
HONEYS
NATURAL
HONEY
SKY KING

NEW FOCUS FOR THE SIXTIES: THE MARKETING-CONCEPT PACKAGE

If someone were to offer a prize for the best photograph of contemporary American life, we would submit the picture on the opposite page.

We make no claims for it as a work of art. It is only an assembly of mundane objects, arranged in a straightforward manner that has no pretensions to artistry. Its worth, rather, lies in the sense of immediate recognition and familiarity it evokes. These boxes, cans, bottles and jars represent a cross-section of highly competitive packaged lines. All of them can be found in most of the 24,000 supermarkets which stretch across the country. Viewed together, they emerge as a concrete symbol of the U.S. marketing revolution, which is summed up in the single phrase, "self-service".

Begun well over a decade ago, this revolution has changed the daily life of practically every American and permanently altered the face of American industry. Its dynamic development continues undiminished through the changing cycles of boom and recession.

THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING

At its inception, the package was universally regarded as the key to that revolution. In today's marketing complex, it is still of paramount importance, for it represents the final link in the long chain of communication leading from factory to retailer. The package is the proof of the pudding which has to justify the corporate investment in the product by performing the final function — selling it.

Such is the importance of the package that you can be sure that at the very moment you are looking at this particular picture, numbers of other marketing executives across the country are studying a similar one, in the hopes of finding the answer to the perennial overwhelming question: what makes one package sell, while another one fails?

THE COMMON LANGUAGE OF PACKAGING

Only a few years ago it seemed that design and marketing expertise had uncovered most of the answers. There developed a set of principles which were summed up in such familiar words as "visual impact," "shelf appeal," "unique image," "brand identity," and "flexible design." All were based on the fact that the package's main function was a selling one. Over many years the techniques to achieve these goals have become so clearly developed and refined that they are part of the common language of any competent package designer.

Keeping these principles in mind, let us examine that picture a little more closely. The packages, remember, are the product of major national manufacturers. An enormous amount of both brain-power and dollars went into their creation, for each of them operates in an especially competitive segment of an especially competitive industry.

What is the one single impression they create?

Simply this: they are all uniformly excellent. Some are better than others, of course, but all of them are good

packages — clean, sharp, bright, functional, and in tune with the consumer's growing sense of discrimination and growing desire for utility. In other words, sellers and designers alike have learned the vital lesson of the importance of carefully planned packaging in effective marketing.

But it is precisely because the lessons of the market have been learned so well by so many sellers that these very sellers are again in deep trouble. The principles which were so successfully developed a decade ago no longer provide that extra margin of superiority which a package must have to succeed in the market.

The times call for a new look at the problem, for the problem itself has changed.

ONLY 100 OUT OF 6000

By the end of 1961, the packaging industry will account for more than $17 billion in total expenditures. This is a huge sum, even by today's inflated standards — $5 billion more than the amount spent on advertising, for instance.

A large percentage of these packages end up in the supermarket, about 5000 per individual market. But even these huge structures cannot accommodate all of the packages produced. Last year, supermarkets were offered as many as 6000 new products, most of them in packages. Out of these some 200 were accepted and less than 100 lasted out the year.

The battle for space is rapidly turning from hot to hotter.

THE COMPETITION IS EVERYWHERE

Nor do the packages compete only with each other. In the fight for public attention they must perform in the entire communications arena against all the other visual attractions to which people are constantly exposed, and which endless numbers of sellers fervently hope they will remember.

In the supermarket itself, there are point-of-purchase ads, shelf-talkers, and end-of-aisle displays, posters and streamers, all vying with the package for the consumer's attention. But he is not free to give his attention, for his mind is already chock-full of a multitude of impressions gleaned from print media advertising, TV and radio commercials, brochures, sales letters, coupon promotions, give-aways, throwaways, road signs, skywriting and just about every conceivable gimmick you can think of.

Against this mighty national din, the package has to tell a final sales-clinching story, quickly and effectively.

UNPLANNED OBSOLESCENCE

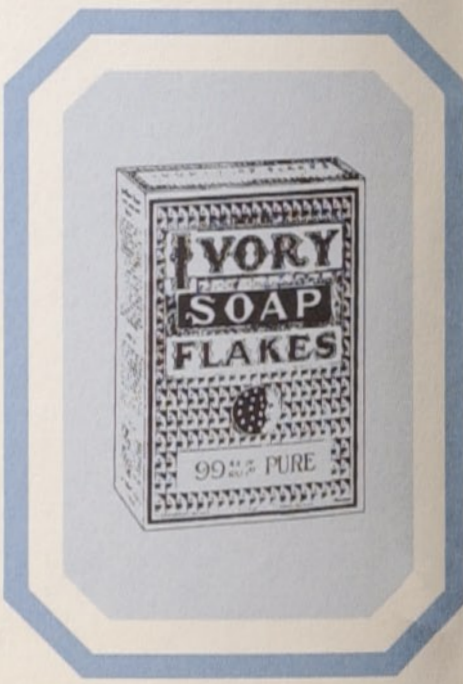
The response of the package planners, engineers and designers to the new challenge has been lively, to say the least. Suddenly we have the squeeze bottle, the aerosol container, the boilable pouch, the in-use package and the throwaway package, the shrinking package and the expanding package.

Swiftly changing techniques in package graphics have been even more marked. From the "no-design" package (remember the loud, cluttered and generally ineffective beer packaging of the 40's?) packaging art has progressed to the abstract design package (the famous Kleenex box is the classic example) to the realistic (pet foods are still going strong in this direction) to the sentimental (the Early American motifs used on cookie packages, for instance), and finally, the latest phase, the romantic (present-day cake mixes).

All this has made packaging a victim of what some observers have called "unplanned obsolescence." Because of the manufacturers' frantic efforts to keep their packages contemporary, most packages do not remain on the shelf or in the pantry long enough to

CHANGING CYCLES IN PACKAGE DESIGN

Like automobiles, ladies fashions and other products of the mass distribution system, packaging styles move in cycles. Below is a review of trends in package design over the past several decades. Left to right: the rococo-cluttered Ivory package of the early 1920's, ornate, hard to read, no visual statement of product nor function or qualities; the formalized package of the 40's, the banded style, the simple form,—a revolution against the ornate; the currently popular photographic technique called the "mood" package with promise of product satisfaction; the future—we are working on it.



build a really solid customer equity. The consumer, in fact, reacts in a similarly chaotic manner, merrily switching his allegiance from brand to brand with distressing frequency. No wonder the cost of holding a share of a market is advancing so alarmingly.

THE NEW DIRECTION: THE MARKETING-CONCEPT PACKAGE

The persistent paradox remains: even in this frenetic atmosphere, some packages do succeed, maintaining their sales superiority over a period of time. Yet many of them, viewed as isolated designs, are no better than their sister packages which have failed miserably.

We challenge any of our readers, for example, to select from the picture shown at the beginning of this issue, the packages which sell best and to justify their decision on the basis of the packages' apparent surface appeal alone.

Their success is, instead, based on something more complex: the marketing concept which formed the basis of their creation.

A well-designed package based on the right concept will succeed. A well-designed package based on the wrong concept will fail.

THE IDEAL PACKAGE WITH THE WRONG CONCEPT

A case in point is the rise and fall of the aerosol toothpastes. Brought out by most of the major dentifrice manufacturers some two years ago, they appeared, at first, to be the perfect replacement for the collapsible metal tube, which was awkward to use and once used, unsightly to look at. Used effectively on literally hundreds of products, the aerosol can seemed an ideal solution to the troublesome problem of how to dispense toothpaste. The prospects looked glorious. For the consumer, a different kind of container to tempt his jaded palate. For the manufacturer, a package that wasn't just new, but that rarity — really new.

But despite the rosy predictions, the aerosol toothpaste container failed. That puzzling creature, the customer, didn't like it. The price was too high, some said. Others pointed to the fact that the consistency of the toothpaste had changed. Still others complained about the difficulty of controlling the amount dispensed. And — most significantly — everybody seemed to feel that an aerosol container just didn't suit toothpaste; it was too bizarre, too different, somehow just not right.

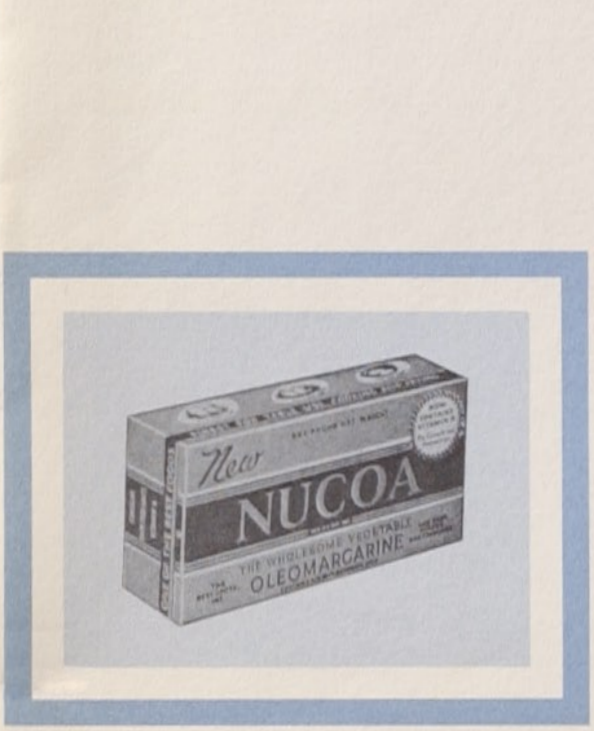
The package was good but the concept was poor. It was poor because for all its consumer-oriented pretensions, it was not really consumer-oriented.

How can the package planner guard against such failures?

HOW NOT TO CREATE A PACKAGE

The typical packaging program of today begins and ends with the package itself. Many marketing tools are put into the mix, to be sure, but from the first market research project through the final stages of testing and selection of a winning design, the focus is on the package.

Every question that is asked, every



problem that is posed, relates to a clearly-defined goal, the creation of a successful package. Marketing situations within the company and the industry which do not bear on the package, are disregarded in the interests of what is supposed to be an efficient packaging program.

This is not the way to create a package.

It is not the way, because it assumes that packaging problems can be solved by packaging solutions. In fact, they cannot. They can only be solved by marketing solutions.

MARKETING SOLUTION #1: POSITIONING THE CORPORATION

One of the most common packaging problems is that of corporate endorsement. Should a package feature the manufacturer, the brand, or the product? Is it to be, for example, Smith's Yummies or Smith's Sugar Cookies? Maybe Yummy Sugar Cookies is the best? But then, Smith's Yummy Sugar Cookies does tell the whole story. On the other hand, how about plain Yummies? Can't beat that for succinctness, can you?

None of these variations, interesting though they may be, penetrates to the core of the problem, which is simply: how broad a spectrum of products can the Smith corporation effectively endorse? Will the consumer accept Smith and readily put his confidence in it as the manufacturer of sugar cookies? And, if so, should its name be put on the package if there is a possibility that in the near future the Smith Company will bring out a competitive line of cookies to compete with its own Yummies?

No general rules apply here. Thus, Procter and Gamble, which has many competing brands of detergents, virtually hides its name on its packages. But Johnson's Wax, which has many competing brands of floor waxes, gives them all its corporate endorsement. Kraft, as one of the best "natural" names in the food business, serves as both a corporate and brand name for many Kraft products. But would the sturdy, homely reputation associated with Kraft stretch to cover an imported delicacy food? We doubt it.

Which path should Smith follow? We cannot say — and should not until we know more about the Smith Company, until we have positioned the corporation securely in its proper marketing niche. Then, and only then, can the alternate packaging solutions be explored.

MARKETING SOLUTION #2: A PRODUCT PROFILE

If you have ever participated in a discussion of how to portray a product on the face of the package, you know how arduous and frustrating the task can be. The decision is a fateful one, for if there is one truism we can all agree on, it is that a package must, in one way or another, convey a powerful impression of the product it contains.

The trouble is that the apparently sensible alternatives are so numerous. Should it be a photograph, illustration or a scene associated with the product? Sometimes the name alone can be effective. On the other hand, a highly glamorized but realistic setting puts the idea across. Realistic symbols work well, so do abstract designs, even trademarks.

With a record of more than a 200 per cent increase in sales during the last decade, the Taylor Wine Company of Hammondsport, New York, looked to a new packaging approach to consolidate its gains, reinforce its present position, and stimulate even greater growth. To achieve these aims, we embarked on an extensive study of the company, the industry, and the product.

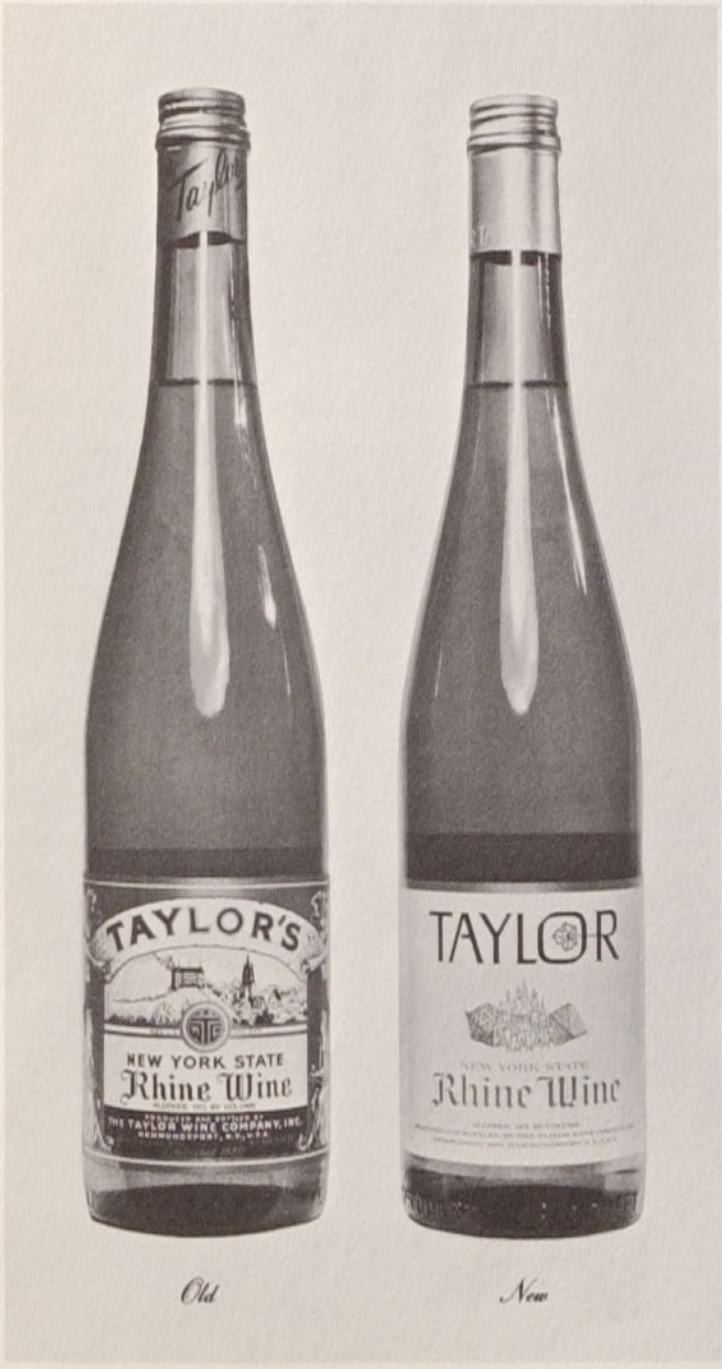
Our conclusions: the American consumer knows little about wines, is confused as to the identity of the many different types. Taylor, however, has an excellent reputation among its customers as a top quality American wine. But even this group is wedded to single brands; none has any idea of the scope of the Taylor line, 18 brands in all.

These facts pointed the way to the marketing solutions. Taylor had to create a new and stronger **company identification**, a clearer **brand image** for each of its wines, an **American appearance** for all its products.

From these marketing guide lines came the design implementation, the new labels. Below are shown two of the Taylor wines, before and after package re-design. Note particularly the Rhine wine. Its packaging motif — a castle and fields — is European, not American. Our research indicated that this particular brand was an exception; consumers would not find a Rhine wine with an American image believable. But its general look is still Taylor.

We question whether such subtle distinctions could have been achieved if a graphic, instead of a marketing study, had set the design standards.

The proof of the pudding is always the sales. In this case, they are expected to reach at least 13 per cent above last year's.

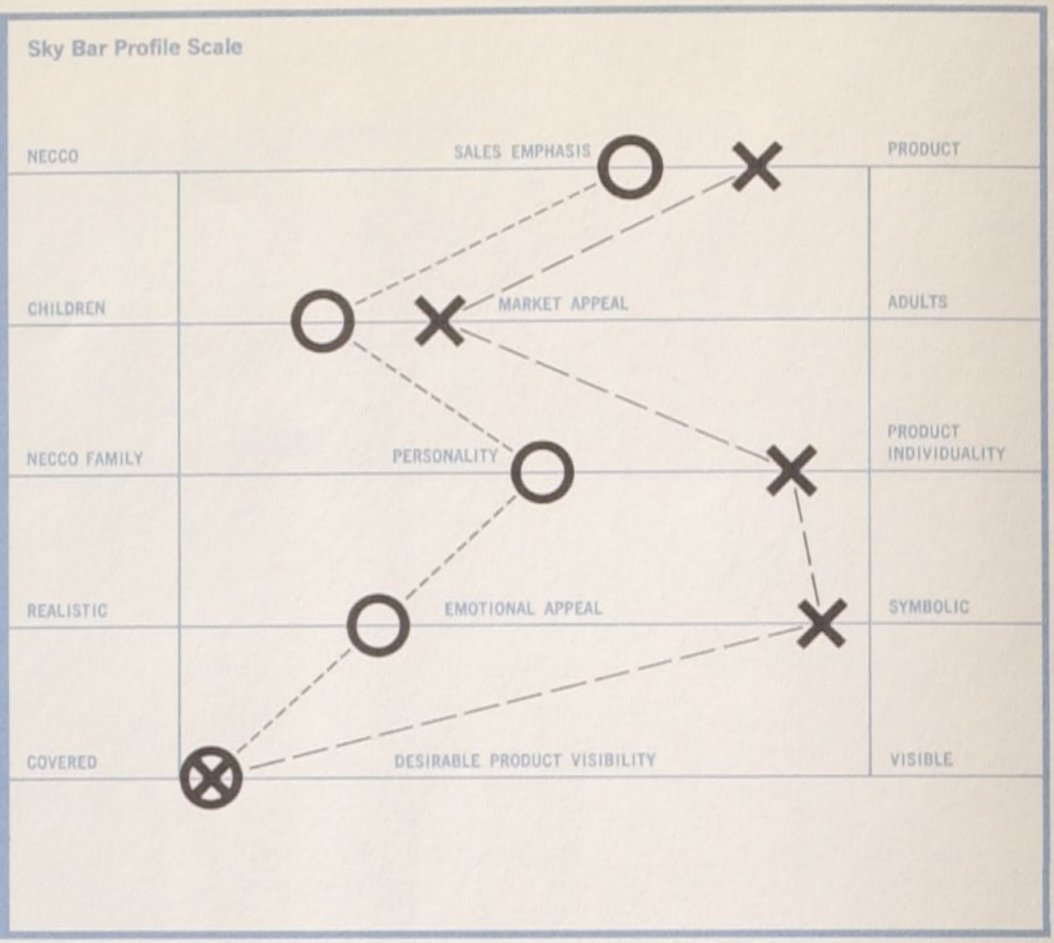


Old *New*

Old *New*

Literally, we mean. For instance this profile of the well-known candy bar, Necco's Sky Bar. The O graph represents the old product image in certain key areas, which were designated by Necco's management. The X line illustrates the desired new image, formulated from market studies.

The result: a series of clear-cut packaging guide lines, which determined the goals for Sky Bar's new package. Below, left, is pictured the old package, a pictorial expression of the O graph; to the right, the new package, a faithful translation in visual terms of the X line. Note how its greater emphasis on product appeal, its stepped-up adult interest and stronger product individuality corresponds to the X profile.



New packaging for most of the Necco line of candies was developed on the basis of similar product profiles. Sales returns on the first of these new packages to reach the market indicate a 15 per cent sales rise.

The responsible executive studies the various solutions paraded before him with painstaking attention. But how can he decide, unless he knows what it is about the product that he wants to project to the buyer?

AWAY FROM THE PACKAGE

Once again, he has to turn resolutely away from the package and go back to the market, this time to the product itself. Research can be of invaluable aid to him here. Nowhere else can he find the facts he is seeking. But how to select and structure the research? A wealth of unrelated facts about the product is only going to confuse the picture.

A solution that is both a short-cut and an answer in depth is the use of a Product Profile.

The structure of these profiles varies from product to product, of course, but the key to it is the posing of a series of questions — direct, searching, and profound — the answers to which will provide a clear-cut and unmistakably sturdy design platform.

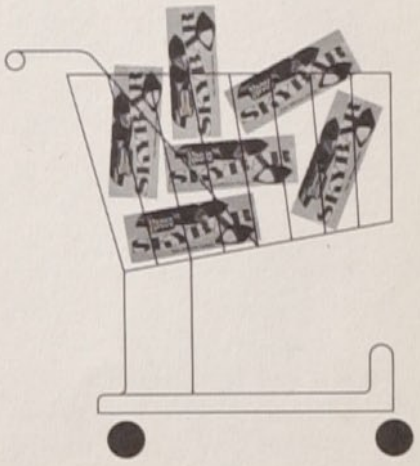
THE NECCO PROFILES: ORDER FROM CHAOS

In the course of an extensive redesign program for the New England Confectionery Company (NECCO), we were asked to create new packaging for their line of candies. The problem was a unique one. The name "Necco" was familiar to a generation of Americans as the name for a colored sugar wafer, so familiar, that to the consumer it represented a product rather than a corporate or even brand name. But the Necco company made many other types of candies, each with a special appeal and a special market.

Ideally, each of these candies could profit from association with the Necco name, yet each had to retain and reinforce its own individual personality. At the same time, the Necco Company could further its competitive position in the industry by upgrading its packaging, applying some of the modern techniques of food packaging to candies.

To solve the problem, our marketing-design team developed five criteria which they felt defined the marketing problems which the packaging had to solve. They included such elements as the problem of corporate versus brand endorsement, market appeal, product personality, emotional appeal, and product visibility. Using market information supplied by Necco's management, they constructed a profile of each candy. The individual profiles could be reproduced in words (short, pithy descriptions of the product) or charted in a curve which depicted the brand's relation to the selected criteria. In this way, almost all elements of doubt were removed and clear guidelines set for the new packaging directions. For an example of one of these profiles and the package it resulted in, see page 8.

The design techniques represented here, candy experts tell us, represent a genuine breakthrough in packaging for this industry. Frankly we feel that it could not have been achieved if we had confined ourselves solely to design experimentation. The marketing approach — in this case, specifically the use of the Product Profile — set the direction.



MARKETING SOLUTION #3: SURVEYING THE INDUSTRY

So far we have been talking of a particular company, and a particular product, the knowledge of which will help create a particular package. But none of these elements — the company, the product, and the package — work in isolation. They are all part of a larger complex, the industry in which they operate.

Just as the product and the company have their special characteristics which must be respected, so does the industry. Unless we understand its peculiar customs and traditions, we may go wrong in designing a package that represents it.

IRRATIONAL INDUSTRIES

The danger is particularly strong for industries that produce "irrational products", by which we mean that the product use, the brand preference and the brand loyalty are not motivated by any seemingly rational factors. Cigarettes are a classic example. Fancy, whim, and mystique all operate here in place of rational choice. We make a mistake, however, if we forget that even these irrational elements operate according to a peculiar logic of their own, which must be respected.

We suspect that the neglect of the one of the cigarette industry's most important logics is responsible for the failure of many of the new brands to catch on. Historically, cigarette brands appeal to segmented portions of the market. Camels are a workingman's cigarette, a westerner's choice, a masculine brand. Pall Malls bespeak elegance and sophistication. Whatever it is, the image must be sharp, must appeal to certain large groups, not to an amorphous whole.

Now, take a look at the packaging for many of these new brands. Do they arouse any clear-cut emotions, evoke any special sensations, stimulate any *personal* response? Most of them, on the contrary, are overwhelmingly conformist, non-differentiated. Would anyone, workingman, executive, playboy, or professional, housewife, teenager, or student be apt to claim them as *his* cigarette?

Not that the surface graphics aren't good. Just not right for the industry they represent and the public they sell to. In other words, a prelude to failure.

MARKETING SOLUTION #4: KEYING THE PACKAGE TO THE ADVERTISING

Packaging and advertising have been eyeing each other suspiciously for some years now. Each pays lip service to the other; each solemnly swears always to come to the other's aid, but when all is said and done the relationship remains a distant one. The rosy promises made at presentation time, fade into obscurity and soon the two are pursuing their opposite paths, disunited and disparate. For our part, viewing the situation from the packaging end, we find the distance alarmingly dangerous. It is time for the two communicators to change from kissing cousins to blood brothers.

We have spoken before of the need for advertising to feature the package (See DESIGN SENSE, 22). Here we are concerned with the opposite side of the coin: the need for the package to re-

In re-designing a well-known package, one of the designer's most difficult tasks is to determine which of the many elements on the existing package should be kept, which changed, and which eliminated altogether.

Design analysis will not solve the problem. These elements have marketing significance; they must be assessed in the light of their relation to the product's market position.

Such was the case with our re-design of the General Foods Sanka package, the first design change since 1949. The purpose of the re-design: to broaden the market by appealing to the younger consumer who demands a full-bodied coffee, without vitiating the basic "97 per cent caffein-free" appeal to older, more health-conscious customers.

Below, left and right, are the old and new Sanka packages. The elements circled on the old package, have been changed or eliminated in the manner you see. Note the subtle changes, none of them quixotic, all dictated by sound marketing strategy.

"Aroma Roast", for instance, is given a bold new treatment; it was found to have strong customer appeal. The Arab trademark, however, is gone, and in its place is a steaming cup of coffee; the Middle-East no longer represents coffee-growing. The word "coffee" is moved closer to the brand name; this emphasizes the "coffee-ness" of the product. Other elements are re-positioned, strengthened or minimized in accordance with their relation to market needs. In short, a new package created to meet the demands of a new market.

Old *New*

peat, or recall in some way the message of the advertising.

Back in the days when package design was just coming into its own, the role of the package on the supermarket shelves was clearly defined. It had, we knew, to act as a flag, or a signal, compelling the attention of the buyer. Primarily it was an *identifier*, recalling the salient features of the company's corporate or product identity.

This still holds true; the need for a corporate identification system is as urgent as ever, but so far as the package is concerned, identity is not enough.

ADVERTISING ON THE SHELF

In the stepped-up communications environment of the sixties, the package must also create advertising appeal at the shelf level. No matter how strong the advertising itself is, it cannot be relied on to carry the ball alone. So many other competitive communicators are at work today, competing for public attention, that we cannot be sure that a prospective purchaser will remember the ad, and act according to its message. A second message is required.

The package should not compete with the ad, nor should it repeat it. What is required is that the package convey a powerful idea, or a concept beyond that of simple product appeal and brand identification.

THE PACKAGE-ADVERTISING APPROACH

The intermeshing of packaging and advertising concepts is not easy to accomplish. Ideally, the package should set the direction which advertising follows. This is easier said than done; advertising campaigns change frequently and the concept of one campaign often differs radically from its predecessor. Yet it can be disastrous to alter the packaging concept to conform to the latest advertising campaign. Suppose the advertising is short-lived? What then will happen to the package, still on the shelves, impossible to withdraw without great expense? We have seen it happen, with results that were, to say the least, unfortunate.

Obviously the packaging and advertising teams must work together *from the start* with the closest kind of cooperation and collaboration, developing a package concept that has specific advertising appeal, yet is broad enough to allow room for a number of advertising campaigns. At the same time, both groups should realize that a change in advertising will not save a failing product. A new, basic theme, represented in both package and advertising has to be introduced, but only after the most careful and painstaking re-examination of the total problem.

TODAY'S MARKETING MOOD

For many managers, aware of the increasing pressures of the market, the "concept method" of packaging seems circumlocutious. The hot breath of competition calls for a crash program. Change the package, beef it up, jazz it up, do anything, just so long as you do it quickly. This is the marketing mood of today.

But when crash program follows crash program, the effect is diluted. The hoped-for bang-up new package may be modern and bright and functional in all respects, but it still turns out to be a dud, and management is hard put to justify the cost of the investment.

Nor is the crash program always accomplished with crash-like alacrity. Cast adrift without the steadying support of marketing principles, it flounders and gets bogged down. This inevitably occurs at the most crucial time, near the end when the final decisions are to be made. Instead of a clear-cut and confident choice, there is endless wrangling, argument, discussion, and a series of re-designs, each of which loses something in real marketing impact. The end product is all too apt to be another "me too" package which cannot hope to achieve a real sales plus.

THE SWING OF THE PENDULUM

The Marketing Concept package is admittedly more difficult to administer. Design and marketing talent of the highest order are called upon to create it, yet these talents must be subordinated to the demands of the whole program. There is no room in the contemporary market environment for undisciplined experimentation, individual preferences, or prejudices.

Packaging in the sixties is completing the swing of the pendulum which began in the fifties, away from individual inspiration and individual domination. Today, the successful package depends in the profoundest sense on its integration from start to finish into the total marketing framework.

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